

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



FIVE SOUTH DAKOTA GUARD SOLDIERS NAMED TO NGB GUARD ENDURANCE TEAM

Five South Dakota Army National Guard soldiers were named to the National Guard Bureau's "All Guard Endurance Team" after competing among 120 National Guard soldiers and airmen from 35 U.S. states and territories. The soldiers competed in time trials in Austin, Texas, Jan. 15, to earn a spot on the male and female teams.

Sgt. Bailey Ruff, Staff Sgt. Lucas Scott, Sgt. 1st Class Paul Hoffman, Capt. Joel Engle, and Lt. Col. Tracy Graves made the team after completing a variety of exercises and running that tested their strength and endurance. Also participating in the competition was Command Sgt. Maj. Josh Mannel.

As All Guard Endurance Team members, the soldiers are now eligible to compete and represent the National Guard for the next two years before being required to requalify. The team participates in about four endurance events annually.

For Ruff, Scott, and Hoffman, this is the second straight time making the team since its inaugural year in 2020.

"This event is so much fun and really encompasses the fitness level that every soldier should be at," said Hoffman, SDARNG Endurance Team state coordinator. "These events are very coordinated, very organized and a lot of fun. The team embodies a physical fitness attitude and the unwillingness to quit no matter what obstacle is put in front of them."

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GUARD ENDURANCE TEAM

(CONTINUED)

The All Guard Endurance Team began as an idea to expand the existing National Guard Marathon Program, while bolstering the National Guard Retention Program, by instilling physical fitness, self-discipline, and esprit de corps among National Guard members from all 50 states, three U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.

The competition included a variety of endurance challenges, or stations, and running in between. The stations included a reverse lunge, 500 meter row, 24 inch box jump, medicine ball sit-up, 500 meter SkiErg, 100 meter farmer's carry, 25 kilometer Cal air bike, dead/slam ball shoulder over, 100 meter tank push/pull and RAM burpees.

"In addition to the 10 endurance stations, the competitors also had to run 500 meters between each of them. The whole event was an equivalent distance of running a 5K," said Graves, who tried out for her first time to make the female team.

For many of the competitors, the event was not only to earn a spot on the team, but to show themselves what they can do.

"I was not heading into this competition expecting to make the team," Graves said. "I was planning on coming here to support many of the other soldiers competing. However, I decided since I was already going to be here, I might as well train up and participate. I surprised myself what I could do and I made the team."

A guest speaker at the event also echoed that sentiment to all the competitors.

"Really, what this competition showed me regardless of your fitness level ... you're competing against yourself. ... You're showing excellence and going above and beyond," said Brig. Gen. Michael Oster, the assistant adjutant general for the South Dakota Army National Guard. Oster, who was the keynote speaker at the awards ceremony, said the competition "makes you feel good about who you are and it makes you feel good about what you do."

Hoffman said being a part of an endurance team requires more than just being physically fit, it also requires having a strong mental attitude.

"There are many different events, so it doesn't take just one thing to compete – don't be scared to get dirty – to compete you must have an overall mindset of not giving up," Hoffman said. "It's an environment meant for very specific people but, it's always fun and it's always educational."

To be on the state team, soldiers must compete in a state qualification event. If soldiers are interested in knowing more about the SDARNG Endurance Team, please contact the state coordinator, Sgt. 1st Class Paul Hoffman at 605-230-0421 or paul.p.hoffman.mil@army.mil.



HONORING OUR PRISONERS OF WAR AND THOSE MISSING IN ACTION

Message from SDDVA Secretary Whitlock —

Earlier this month, veterans gathered in Pierre for the dedication and unveiling of the POW/MIA chair of honor. The chair, donated by Rolling Thunder Inc. Chapter 2 of Brookings, is located on the west wing of the second floor at the South Dakota Capitol.

Special thanks to Bob Foster and the members of Rolling Thunder Inc. Chapter 2, Governor Kristi Noem, the South Dakota Bureau of Administration, and the members of the Capitol Complex Restoration and Beautification Commission for their support of this display.

America's Prisoners of War fought fiercely and served with honor and distinction under the worst conditions.

They demonstrated personal courage, selflessness, and unflagging loyalty to their country. Theirs is a quiet courage based on hope and trust that saw them through the most brutal and depressing of all military experiences. Whether their imprisonment lasted a few weeks or many years, during that trying time there was no end in sight, only their personal will to go on.

To lose your freedom while fighting for the freedom of others is a personal irony that has deep emotional impact. We who have not experienced that loss can't comprehend it on a personal level, but we can make it meaningful for every citizen by honoring those who have given their freedom for the security of our nation. In their service to our country, former prisoners of war have sacrificed mightily to maintain the promise of liberty that we hold dear.

They served with dignity and honor under the worst of human conditions – starvation, isolation, torture,

and the ever-present threat of death. Yet even during their darkest hour, they demonstrated remarkable personal courage and unwavering devotion to family and country. Their strength is a testament to American character.

To the thousands of military families tormented by uncertainty due to the loss of loved ones whose whereabouts remain unknown, we want you to know that we will never forget their courage; nor the sacrifices they made so that we can enjoy the freedoms we embrace today as Americans.



Let this empty chair serve as a reminder of those who served in the military of our great nation, but have not returned home to us. They are Prisoners of War and Missing in Action. America will forever be grateful for your bravery and sacrifice in service to our nation.

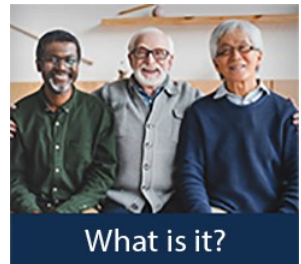
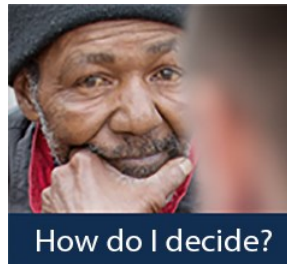
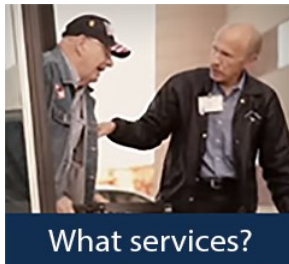
WE WILL NEVER FORGET!



VA AMPLIFIES ACCESS TO HOME, COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs' [Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care](#) is expanding its [Home-Based Primary Care](#), [Medical Foster Home](#) and [Veteran-Directed Care](#) programs to make them available at all VA medical centers by the end of fiscal year 2026.

Home Based Primary Care



The VA will add 58 medical foster homes and 70 veteran-directed care programs to VAMCs across the nation and add 75-home-based primary care teams to areas with the highest unmet need.

“These evidence-based programs allow veterans to age-in-place, avoid or delay nursing home placement and choose the care environment that aligns most with their care needs, preferences, and goals,” said Executive Director of VA Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care Scotte Hartronft, M.D. “Veterans using these programs have experienced fewer hospitalizations and emergency department visits, reduced hospital and nursing home days and fewer nursing home readmissions and inpatient complications.”

According to [VA's Policy Analysis and Forecasting Office](#), the number of veterans of all ages who are eligible for nursing home care is estimated to expand from approximately two million veterans in 2019 to more than four million by 2039. As this population grows, the VA remains steadfast in providing the highest levels of care to veterans in the least-restrictive settings.

These programs provide an in-home or smaller care setting than traditional institutionalized long-term care. This smaller setting of care supports less risk of transmission of COVID and other infectious diseases. Many veterans have chosen these programs instead of institutionalized care during the pandemic for more flexibility in care preferences and less risk of COVID transmission.

Learn more about [VA geriatrics](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan 30-31—SD VFW Annual Legislative Conference—Moose Lodge (910 N. Deadwood Street)—Fort Pierre
Feb 21—State Offices Closed
Feb 18-20—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma
Feb 26-27—SD Vietnam Veterans & Era Reunion—Ramada Inn—Mitchell
Feb 27-Mar 2—DAV Mid Winter Conference—Washington, DC
Feb 27-Mar 3—National VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC
Mar 26—Stand Up for Women Veterans Retreat—Our Savior Lutheran Church (909) W. 33rd Street)—Sioux Falls—8:30 am—1:30 pm (CT)
Apr 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Apr 8-10—DAV of South Dakota State Convention—Rushmore Hotel and Suites (445 Mt. Rushmore Road)—Rapid City
Apr 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Military Heritage Alliance Building—Spirit of America Room—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
Jun 9-12—State VFW Convention—Ramada Inn—Mitchell
Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride
Jun 16-19—State American Legion Conference—Watertown
Jul 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls
Aug 6-9—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
Aug 14-19—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City
Aug 15-17—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
Sep 1-5—South Dakota State Fair
Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

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South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>

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